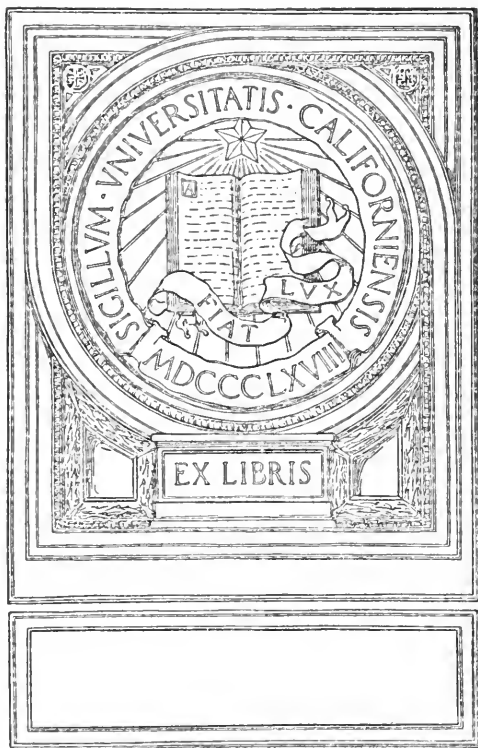


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ARCHIBALD MARSHALL
A REALISTIC NOVELIST
WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

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ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

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A Realistic Novelist

BY

WILLIAM LYON PHELPS

Lampson Professor of English Literature at Yale

WITH FRONTISPIECE



NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1918

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ALBION LADY, 1918
PUBLISHED BY DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, INC.

TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

NOTABLE FOR SCHOLARS AND TEACHERS AND
TWO CREATIVE ARTISTS

THE NOVELIST ROBERT HERRICK
THE POET WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY

197116

PREFACE

THE original form of this book was a lecture on the William Vaughn Moody foundation at the University of Chicago, delivered on the sixth of February, 1918. A portion of it was subsequently printed in the *North American Review*. It now appears considerably revised and enlarged.

W. L. P.

Yale University,
Tuesday, 21 May, 1918.

ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

ON a mellow day in the early autumn of the year 1900, I sat on an old wooden bench in the open air with an English gentleman, and listened to his conversation with a mixture of curiosity and reverence. The place was one of the fairest counties of England, the town on the other side of a screen of trees was Dorchester, and my seat-mate was Thomas Hardy. I remember his saying without any additional emphasis than the weight of the words, that the basis of every novel should be a story. In considering this remark, which came, not from a doctrinaire, but from a master of long and triumphant experience, I could not help thinking that what seems axiomatic is often belied by a majority of instances. Thus, we church-members would agree that religion must take the first place in our lives; yet a disinterested observer, who should begin at the other end of the proposition and examine our lives merely to discover what actually did take

the first place therein, might conceivably miss the element of religion altogether. In the same way, while it would theoretically seem that every novel must be a story, an honest critic who should examine the total product of prose fiction for any given year in the twentieth century, might, in a large number of cases, easily fail to find any story at all.

As we look back over the history of the English novel, it would appear that every permanent work of fiction has been a great story. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones*, *Humphry Clinker*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Esmond*, *David Copperfield*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Richard Feverel*, *The Return of the Native*, *Treasure Island*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Huckleberry Finn*, although they represent various shades of realism and romanticism, have all been primarily stories, in which we follow the fortunes of the chief actors with steady interest. These books owe their supremacy in fiction—at least, most of them do—to a combination of narrative, character, and style; every one of them, if given in colloquial paraphrase to a group of men around a camp-fire, would be rewarded with attention.

* Sometimes the very thing that gives a drama or a novel immediate currency makes it smell of mortality; by taking advantage of some hotly-discussed social question, general interest is awakened; but when the question is obsolete, what becomes of the work of art? I shall not venture to make a prediction; but I think it is at least possible that some of the earlier plays of Ibsen, like *The Pretenders*, may outlast some of the later ones, like *Ghosts*; the later ones blaze with the flames of public debate, the earlier reflect the light of the stars.

Of all forms of literature, the novel has suffered most by its desertion of art for propaganda. It has been debased by its popularity. It lends itself so easily as a channel for political, social or religious oratory. Every theorist uses it as a megaphone. Although novels are as common as grasshoppers, good stories are scarce. Now this desertion of art for propaganda is founded on the fallacy that a work of pure fiction cannot stand or ought not to stand by itself, but should lean on politics, social reform, science, or theology for support. We do not insist on a thesis in sculpture or music or painting or poetry. There have been, indeed, many attempts to turn Pegasus into a

cart-horse; and unfortunately the attempt is almost invariably successful.

I prefer novels that express the opinions of the characters in the story to those that express the opinions of the author. I do not mean that all novels ought to be impersonal; such a result, even when most ardently desired by the novelist, is impossible of achievement. The work of every true artist reflects his personality, and is, in a sense, subjective. Even the coldest novels betray their makers' sympathies, and the standpoint from which they regard the world. But there is a difference between having ideas and arguing a case. Women who have ideas are always more interesting than those who have only opinions.

Why is it that so many novelists write their best books early in their careers? Is it not sometimes because the original impelling artistic impulse becomes dulled in contact with society, and thoughts take the place of thought? The thorns of this world spring up and choke them. It is by no accident that *The Mill on the Floss* is a greater novel than *Daniel Deronda*.

The most enduring novels come from the silent depths in a writer's soul, not from the

turbulent shallows. To live deeply is easier in a country where deep living has been done for centuries than in a country whose human history is brief. If we should really feel chagrined by America's native contribution to literature in comparison with that of Europe, we might justifiably console ourselves by comparing America with Australia. Surely one reason why the British today write novels rather better than the Americans, is because their roots go down deeper into the rich soil of the past. Men of genius are scarce in any locality, and I am not at this moment thinking of them; but I am constantly surprised at the large number of contemporary novels produced in Great Britain whose literary style bears the unmistakable stamp of distinction. There are leaders, whose names are known everywhere; there are men and women who might conceivably be leaders if they lived out of Europe. The best reason why many admirable twentieth century works of prose fiction in England fail to attract general attention is because the level of excellence is so high.

II

H. G. WELLS is not the hero of this book. I am holding my roses for a figure that has not yet appeared upon my little stage. But the career of Mr. Wells, whose novels have almost every quality except charm, is interesting to contemplate. That he is a born novelist was clear to me so early as the year 1895, when one of his best stories appeared—*The Wheels of Chance*. Not long after came the novels of science and socialism that carried his name around the world; he was discussed in the salons of Paris and in the prisons of Siberia. His books were all busy, noisy, talkative, restless; they reflected in their almost truculent mental aggressiveness the mass of undigested and indigestible quasi-scientific fodder that perhaps disturbs more than it nourishes the twentieth century stomach; they made many readers fondly believe they were living the intellectual life. I mistakenly supposed he would keep up this squirrel-cage activity to the end of his days; for I

mistakenly supposed in all this clatter he was incapable of hearing the voice of the spirit. I used to think that if all the world suddenly became religious except one man, that man would be H. G. Wells.

The war, which diverted the energies of so many quiet thinkers to matters of immediate and practical efficiency, produced a rather different effect upon this interesting man. He began to regard things that are temporal in relation to those of eternal import. He became converted—I have no hesitation in using the good old word—and while I can see no evidence of conviction of sin, for humility is not his most salient characteristic, he did come to believe and believes now, that religion ought to be the motive power of man. What direction his ideas may take in the future I cannot divine; but I am thankful for his conversion, if only for the reason that it inspired him to produce a masterpiece, *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*. This novel is not only far and away his best book, it is the ablest work of fiction about the war that I have read. But it owes its eminence not to its accurate reporting of the course of social history during the war, for after all, the much admired hockey-game is not much higher

than major journalism, but rather to the profound sense of spiritual values which is the core of the book.

I regard it as unfortunate that Mr. Wells felt it necessary to follow up the triumph of this tale with a treatise on theology called *God the Invisible King*, and with a propagandist novel, called *The Soul of a Bishop*. For the last-named book illustrates all the faults of its species, as well as the cardinal sin against art. *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* is religious; *The Soul of a Bishop* is sectarian. And *God the Invisible King*, while it should be read with sympathy for its author's sincerity and newly-found idealism, has all the arrogance and cocksureness of an old-fashioned theologian without the preliminary years of devoted learning that gave the old-fashioned one some right to a hearing, provided of course he could induce any one to listen to him. No orthodox evangelist has ever been more sure of God than Mr. Wells. The novel was properly named *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*; and we might with equal propriety name the treatise, *Mr. Britling Sees Through It*.

Strange and unfortunate that Mr. Wells should think that the religious element in Mr.

Britling needed additional emphasis. A work of art founded on eternal verities will accomplish more for the cause of religion than any tract. Solely from the moral point of view, *Anna Karenina* is a more impressive book than most of its author's subsequent exhortations.

The Soul of a Bishop is not a realistic novel, for there is no real character in it. It is already on its way to limbo, along with *Robert Elsmere* and *The Inside of the Cup*. But it is an excellent illustration of the fate that awaits an artist when he sacrifices the truth of art for the enforcement of personal opinion. There was a time when the excitement over the question of trades-unions produced by *Put Yourself in His Place* was at fever heat; but that novel today is almost forgotten, while *The Cloister and the Hearth* will be read by generation after generation, simply because it is a great story.

III

IN order to illustrate what I mean by a realistic novelist whose happiest effects are gained by writing good stories with real characters, I know of no better choice among contemporaries than Archibald Marshall. He is an artist of such dignity and refinement that only twice in his career has he written a novel that had for its main purpose something other than truth to life; in each of these two attempts the result was a failure.

I know how difficult it is to "recommend" novels to hungry readers, for I have written prescriptions to alleviate many kinds of mental trouble, yes, and physical ailments too; but how can I be sure that the remedy will in every "case" be effective? I know that *Treasure Island* cured me of an attack of tonsillitis and that *Queed* cured me of acute indigestion; a United States naval officer informed me that he recovered from jaundice simply by reading *Pride and Prejudice*. These are facts; but what assurance have I that other sufferers can try these prescriptions with reasonable hope?

Yet I have no hesitancy in recommending Archibald Marshall to any group of men or women or to any individual of mature growth. One scholar of sixty years of age told me that these novels had given him a quite new zest in life; and I myself, who came upon them on one of the luckiest days of my existence, confidently affirm the same judgment. Of the numerous persons that I have induced to read these books, I have met with only one sceptic; this was a shrewd, sharp-minded woman of eighty, who declared with a hearty laugh that she found them insupportably tame. I understand this hostility, for when girls reach the age of eighty, they demand excitement.

Those who are familiar with Mr. Marshall's work and life will easily discover therein echoes of his own experience. He is an Englishman by birth and descent, familiar with both town and country. He was born on the sixth of September, 1866, and received in his home life and preliminary training plenty of material which appeared later in the novels. His father came from the city, like the father in *Abington Abbey*; he himself was graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, like the son of *Peter Binney*; it was intended but not destined that

he should follow his father's business career, and he worked in a city office like the son of Armitage Brown; he went to Australia like the hero's sister in *Many Junes*; he made three visits to America, but fortunately has not yet written an American novel; he studied theology with the intention of becoming a clergyman in the Church of England, like so many young men in his stories; in despair at finding a publisher for his work, he became a publisher himself, and issued his second novel, *The House of Merrilees*, which had as much success as it deserved; he tried journalism before and during the war; he lived in two small Sussex towns with literary associations, Winchelsea and Rye, in the latter from 1908 to 1913; then until 1917 his home was in Switzerland; he has now gone back to the scene of his university days, Cambridge.

In 1902 he was married and lived for some time in Beaulieu (pronounced Bewly) in the New Forest, faithfully portrayed in *Exton Manor*. He spent three happy years there planning and making a garden, like the young man in *The Old Order Changeth*. Although his novels are filled with hunting and shooting, he is not much of a sportsman himself, being

content only to observe. He loves the atmosphere of sport rather than sport. His favourite recreations are walking, reading, painting, and piano-playing, and the outdoor flavour of his books may in part be accounted for by the fact that much of his writing is done in the open air.

Like many another successful man of letters, his first step was a false start; for in 1899 he produced a novel called *Peter Binney, Undergraduate*, which has never been republished in America, and perhaps never will be. This is a topsy-turvy book, where an ignorant father insists on entering Cambridge with his son; and after many weary months of coaching, succeeds in getting his name on the books. The son is a steady-headed, unassuming boy, immensely popular with his mates; the father, determined to recapture his lost youth, disgraces his son and the college by riotous living, and is finally expelled. The only good things in the book are the excellent pictures of May Week and some snap-shots at college customs; but the object of the author is so evident and he has twisted reality so harshly in order to accomplish it, that we have merely a work of distortion.

For six years our novelist remained silent;

and he never returned to the method of reversed dynamics until the year 1915, when he published *Upsidonia*, another failure. Once again his purpose is all too clear; possibly irritated by the exaltation of slum stories and the depreciation of the characters of the well-to-do often insisted upon in such works, he wrote a satire in the manner of *Erewhon*, and called it a novel. Here poverty and dirt are regarded as the highest virtues, and the possession of wealth looked upon as the sure and swift road to social ostracism. There is not a gleam of the author's true skill in this book, mainly because he is so bent on arguing his case that exaggeration triumphs rather too grossly over verisimilitude. He is, of course, trying to write nonsense; a mark that some authors have hit with deliberate aim, while perhaps more have attained the same result with less conscious intention. Now Mr. Marshall cannot write nonsense even when he tries; and failure in such an effort is particularly depressing. He is at his best when his art is restrained and delicate; in *Upsidonia* he drops the engraving-tool and wields a meat-axe. Let us do with *Peter Binney* and with *Upsidonia* what every other

reader has done; let us try to forget them, remembering only that two failures in fifteen books is not a high proportion.

Of the remaining thirteen novels, two attained only a partial success; and the reason is interesting. These two are *The House of Merrilees* and *Many Junes* (1908). The former was written in 1901 but publishers would none of it, and it did not wear a print dress until 1905. Meanwhile the author was trying his hand at short stories, for which his method of work is not particularly fitted, his skill being in the development of character rather than in the manufacture of incident. He did, however, publish a collection of these tales in one volume, called *The Terrors*, which appeared in 1913, their previous separate publication covering a period of sixteen years. They are amazingly unequal in value; some are excellent, and others trivial. This volume is out of print, and whether any of the contents may be rescued from oblivion is at present problematical. It is interesting, however, that he, at the outset of his career, supposed that invention, rather than observation, was his trump card. The realism of *The House of Merrilees* is mixed with melodrama and mystery; these

are, in the work of a dignified artist, dangerous allies, greater liabilities than assets. In a personal letter he confesses that this artificial plot hampered him; but he goes on to say, "the range of scene and character in that book is something that I have never been able to catch since." He has since—with only one relapse—happily forsaken artificially constructed mysteries for the deepest mystery of all—the human heart. In *Many Junes*, a story that will be reprinted in America in 1919, we have pictures of English country life of surpassing loveliness; we have an episode as warm and as fleeting as June itself; we have a faithful analysis of the soul of a strange and solitary man, damned from his birth by lack of decision. But the crisis in the tale is brought about by an accident so improbable that the reader refuses to believe it. The moment our author forsakes reality he is lost; it is as necessary for him to keep the truth as it was for Samson to keep his hair. Furthermore, this is the only one of Mr. Marshall's books that has a tragic close—and his art cannot flourish in tragedy, any more than a native of the tropics can live in Lapland. The bleak air of lost illusion and frustrated hope, in

which the foremost living novelist, appropriately named, finds his soul's best climate, is not favourable to Archibald Marshall.

The "relapse" mentioned in the preceding paragraph occurred in the year 1912, when he published a long and wildly exciting novel, called *The Mystery of Redmarsh Farm*. This has all the marks of a "best-seller" and went through several editions in England, though it has not yet been reprinted in America. I regard the writing of this book as the most dangerous moment in Mr. Marshall's career, for its immediate commercial success might easily have tempted him to continue in the same vein, and if he had, he would have sunk to the level of a popular entertainer, and lost his position among British novelists of the past and present. Curiously enough, it came between two of his best works in the Clinton series, *The Eldest Son* (1911) and *The Honour of the Clintons* (1913). Maybe the chilling reception given to his finest stories drove him to a cheaper style of composition. Maybe his long second visit to Australia, where he saw and shared experiences quite unlike his English environment, made him try his hand at mystery and crime. In 1911 he had published *Sunny Australia*, the

result of a sojourn on that continent, whither he had gone as special commissioner for the *Daily Mail*. There is a good deal of superficial cleverness in *The Mystery of Redmarsh Farm*; its plot is elaborate, with a flavour of *Lohengrin*; the beautiful lonely maiden's young brother is stolen by a villain and rescued by a young hero who is appropriately named Knightly; a misunderstanding separates the girl and her lover, who sails away to Australia. Unlike Lohengrin, however, he returns, and all is well. There is a conventional detective, and a murder trial and a shipwreck and a recognition scene—I kept looking back to the title-page to see if the author really was Archibald Marshall. It is as though Joseph Conrad should write like Marie Corelli. Yet although some of the characters are unreal and the plot artificial and the villain theatrical, the environment, whether in England or in Australia, is as accurately painted as in Mr. Marshall's best stories. He will not write of places that he has not seen. When the gypsies are found, they are found in the New Forest; and any one who reads this yarn immediately after *Sunny Australia*, will see that these distant scenes are correctly described.

IV

IT was in the year 1906, and in the novel *Richard Baldock*, that he revealed his power. This book, which will make its first American appearance in the autumn of 1918, contains a story so absorbing that it is only in the retrospect that one realizes the vitality of its characters and the delicacy of its art. There are no heroes and no villains. Every person has the taint that we all inherited from Adam, and every person has some reflection of the grace of God. There is no one who does not say something foolish or ill-considered; and there is no one who does not say something wise. In other words there are no types, like "heavies," "juveniles," and "ingenues." As is the case in nearly all the novels by its author, we are constantly revising our opinions of the characters; and we revise them, not because the characters are untrue, but because we learn to know them better. Human nature is consistent only in its inconsistency. It is forever fluid and dynamic; and although no individual has

ever understood another, and least of all himself, increasing knowledge helps to make us certain of our uncertainty. No man will play the part his friends have written for him. One reason why Shakespeare was a first-rate and Jonson a second-rate dramatist is because Jonson created humours and Shakespeare created individuals. Among all Shakespeare's personages, Hamlet is the most interesting to readers and the most baffling to commentators; because the latter try to adjust him to a theory of madness, weak will, or what not. Is not the fact that he has never been understood by any one and never will be, the strongest proof of his reality? Some think he lacked backbone; others insist he was all backbone; some think he was mad; others that he only pretended to be mad; while America's greatest Shakespearean scholar said he was neither mad nor pretended to be. A young gentleman of Hamlet's copious temperament, placed as he was amid natural and supernatural forces, might easily at times seem to illustrate any one of the above appraisals. Indeed I suppose the sanest and most resolute among us seem at times to lack either resolution or sanity or both.

The more complex a character, the less de-

pendable he is. And everybody has some complexity. Even quiet Horatio, beloved of Hamlet for his steady self-control, tried to commit suicide.

Every fine novel and every fine drama must of course illustrate the law of causation—the principle of sufficient reason. But characters that run in grooves are not human. In *Richard Baldock*, we have, as we so often have in the work of Archibald Marshall, strife between father and son—a kind of civil war. This war, like many others, is begotten of misunderstanding. There is not only the inevitable divergence between the older and the younger generation, there is the divergence between two powerful individualities. We at first sympathize wholly with the son. We say to ourselves that if any man is foolish enough to sacrifice all his joy in life to a narrow creed, why, after all, that is his affair; it is only when he attempts to impose this cheerless and barren austerity on others, that we raise the flag of revolt. At the deathbed of the young mother, one of the most memorable scenes in our author's books, we are quite certain that we shall never forgive the inflexible bigot; this hatred for him is nourished when he attempts to crush the son as he

did crush his wife. Yet, as the story develops, and we see more deeply into the hearts of all the characters, we understand how the chasm between father and son is finally crossed. It is crossed by the only durable bridge in the world—the bridge of love, which beareth all things.

Tolerance—when based not on indifference, but on sympathy—is tolerant even of intolerance.

V

IN 1907 appeared one of the most characteristic of Mr. Marshall's novels, *Exton Manor*, which he began to write the day after he finished *Richard Baldock*. It was naturally impossible for any well-read reviewer to miss the likeness to Anthony Trollope. If I believed in the transmigration of souls, I should believe that Archibald Marshall was a reincarnation of Trollope, and William De Morgan a reincarnation of Dickens. In an interesting preface written for the American edition, Mr. Marshall manfully says that he has not only tried to follow Anthony Trollope, "but the whole body of English novelists of his date, who introduced you to a large number of people, and left you with the feeling that you knew them all intimately, and would have found yourself welcome in their society. That particular note of intimacy seems to be lacking in the fiction of the present day, and I should like to have it back."

This instantly raises the question of Victor-

ianism, to some a stumbling-block, to some foolishness. For my part, if I did not believe that the best Victorian fiction was superior to contemporary work, I should not be so hearty an admirer of Archibald Marshall. Indeed the best Victorian novels surpass our best twentieth century novels in the one respect where we chiefly plume ourselves on our claim to attention—I mean in the matter of sincerity. We talk about sincerity all the time, but we protest too much; the essence of sincerity is present perhaps more often in art, as it is in life, where its profession is least urgent. Henry James, in the fragment of autobiography called *The Middle Years*, wisely though oracularly remarked, “Phenomena may be interesting, thank goodness, without being phenomena of elegant expression or of any other form of restless smartness, and when once type is strong, when once it plays up from deep sources, every show of its sincerity delivers us a message and we hang, to real suspense, on its continuance of energy, on its again and yet again consistently acquitting itself. So it keeps in tune, and, as the French adage says, *c’est le ton qui fait la chanson*. The mid-Victorian London was sincere—that was a vast virtue and

a vast appeal; the contemporary is sceptical, and most so when most plausible.”

On a summer day in 1914, I had the pleasure of a ten-mile drive over the hills with one of the wisest old men in America—Andrew D. White. I remember his saying that one of the most fortunate things that could happen to America would be a general ambition on the part of the more educated classes to look forward as to a goal in life to making a permanent home in the country. He said that in America men who make a little money move into the city as soon as possible; whereas in England, whenever a man makes a competence in the city he usually establishes a home in the country. No one can read the novels of Mr. Marshall without feeling that his books are so to speak based on this ideal; he repeatedly insists that life in the country is the true life for thoughtful men and women, and that the most delectable season for the solid enjoyment of it is the winter. Nay, he takes the position—a position also occupied by one of our ablest American novelists, Dorothy Canfield—that the most favourable locality for studying human nature is the small country village. He says, “Life in such a community as is depicted in *Exton Manor* is just

as typical of English social habits as it was in Trollope's day. The tendency of those who have hitherto worked on the land to drift into the towns is not shared by the more leisured classes. Their tendency is all the other way—to forsake the towns for the country—and improved methods of communication keep them more in touch with the world than they would have been fifty years ago. But in spite of this increased dependency upon the outside world, English country life is still intensely local in its personal interests, and quite legitimately so, for it must be remembered that, if the man who lives in a fairly populous country village comes across fewer people than the man who lives in a town, he knows all about those whom he does come across, and his acquaintances represent a far greater variety of type and class than is met with where types and classes tend to stratify. You have, in fact, in a typical country parish, a microcosm of English social life, and there is, ready to the hand of the realistic novelist, material from which he can draw as much interest and variety as he is able to make use of."

In another important question which concerns the art of the novelist, I might applaud

Mr. Marshall's dictum more unreservedly if I did not happen to know of a gigantic witness against him. In forestalling gossip identification of his leading characters in *Exton Manor*, he says, "It is not a novelist's business to draw portraits, but to create living figures, and the nearer he gets to the first the farther off will he be from the second." This certainly sounds well; but unfortunately for its universal application, practically all of the characters in *Anna Karenina* are accurate portraits.

VI

TO all those who have not yet read a single work by our author, I would counsel them to begin with *The Squire's Daughter*, and then take up—with particular care to preserve the correct sequence—*The Eldest Son*, *The Honour of the Clintons*, *The Old Order Changeth* [English title, *Rank and Riches*]. These four stories deal with the family and family affairs of the Clintons, and together with a separate book, *The Greatest of These* [English title, *Roding Rectory*], belong to Mr. Marshall's best period, the years from 1909 to 1915. When I say the best period, I mean the most fruitful up to the present moment in 1918. He is in the prime of life, and it is to be hoped that he may yet surpass himself; but since 1915, perhaps owing to the obsession of the war, he has not done so. *Watermeads* (1916) is a charming story, and in *Abington Abbey* (1917), and its sequel, *The Graftons* (1918), he has introduced us to another interesting family; but neither of these books reaches the level main-

tained by the Clinton tetralogy, nor penetrates so deeply into the springs of life and conduct as his most powerful work, *The Greatest of These*.

Mr. Marshall began *The Squire's Daughter* as a long "short story," starting with what is now Chapter XII, *Food and Raiment*. He fell in love with his characters, as many a novelist has done, and expanded the narrative. Then he wrote *The Eldest Son*, which is the best of the four books. Yet it was not a success in England, and at present both *The Squire's Daughter* and *The Eldest Son* are out of print in their home country; they are, however, having a daily-increasing circulation in America, which is bound to resurrect them in Great Britain. For that matter most of Mr. Marshall's novels are more widely known and certainly more appreciated in the United States than in the land of their nativity. In *The Honour of the Clintons*, the author's intention was to "take up the old Squire, see what all his generations of gentility and honour, and all his conviction that he is of superior clay, amount to when he is touched with personal disgrace." He discovered, as Dickens must have discovered in writing the *Pickwick Papers*, that his

hero turned out rather better than he thought he would. This third book in the series was written under inspiration, completed in six weeks, and at the time came almost as near satisfying the author as it always has satisfied me. But a friend, with true English candour, said to him, "All the ingredients of the cake are there, but the cake hasn't risen." Anyhow, the Squire rose, whether the cake did or not.

The final novel in the Clinton family, *The Old Order Changeth*, shows the effect produced on both Rank and Riches by the Great War. Mr. Marshall began this story with many misgivings, and it is still not one of his favourites, chiefly because "there are so many beastly people in it." But so long as I live it will hold a secure place in my heart, for this is the first work of the author's that I saw. Indeed I had never heard of him until I picked up *The Old Order Changeth*. I started to read it with no conception of the keen delight in store; after finishing it, I wrote to the publishers, "Who on earth is Archibald Marshall? There is no one like him in the world. Send me everything he has written." Since that moment of exaltation, I have read and reread the Clinton books, and each time they seem better.

To read the Clinton stories is to be a welcome guest in a noble old English country house, to meet and to associate on terms of happy intimacy with delightful, well-bred, clear-minded men and women; to share the outdoor life of healthful sport, and the pleasant conversation around the open fire; to sharpen one's observation of natural scenery in summer and in winter, and in this way to make a permanent addition to one's mental resources; to learn the significance of good manners, tact, modesty, kindly consideration, purity of heart—not by wearisome precepts, but by their flower and fruit in human action. To read these books is not to dodge life, it is to have it more abundantly.

If, as Bacon said, a man dies as often as he loses his friends, then he gains vitality by every additional friendship. To know the Clinton family and their acquaintances is not merely to be let into the inner circle of English country life, to discover for ourselves exactly what sort of people English country folk are, to understand what family tradition and ownership of the land mean to them—it is to enlarge our own range of experience and to increase our own stock of genuine happiness, by adding to our

mental life true friends—and friends that are always available. For often the friends of flesh and blood cannot be reached when we need them most; perhaps they are asleep, or away on a journey; but the staunch old friends introduced to us by novelists never deny themselves. Is not this a fairly good reason why, among all the novels we read, some at all events should be selected for the immanent charm of their characters? I know how uncritical it is to admire any work of art that possesses the element of cheerfulness; but suppose our reading of novels were entirely confined to the works of Maxim Gorki?

Why should we always select acquaintances in fiction that we always avoid in real life? Is it the same instinct that makes so many persons love to go slumming?

There is perhaps rather too strong a flavour of tea in these stories, but that no doubt is a legitimate part of their realism. The sacred rite of afternoon tea plays fully as big a part in English fiction as it plays in English life. Tea—which would be an intolerable interruption to business or to golf among normal Americans—is never superfluous to the British. Among the hundreds of English novels that

you have read, can you recall a single instance where any character *declined* a cup of tea? And, in terrible crises or trivial vexations, is not the following exclamation familiar—"I am dying for my tea!" I sometimes think that if the house should be destroyed by fire at three o'clock, half-past four would find the family taking tea on the lawn. I remember, on a voyage to Alaska, a vigorous old English woman who appeared on deck every day between four and five, and when she saw the circulation of the china, a look of holy rapture dawned in her eyes, and from her lips came an ecstatic cry, "Ah, is there tea going?" It must be wonderful to love anything on earth so much as the English love their tea.

Two months after writing the above paragraph, I received testimony which delightfully supports the view expressed. An Englishman informs me, that after the big sea-fight of Jutland, he had the privilege of conversing with an English blue-jacket who was perched aloft during the whole of that terrific experience. There he remained under orders, in the thick of the battle, with the bolts of death flying all about him. On being asked how he felt, the young

man exclaimed with a tone of regret, "Well, of course, I had to miss my tea."

Not since Fielding's Squire Western has there been a more vivid English country squire than Mr. Marshall's Squire Clinton. The difference between them is the difference between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. He is the man of the house, the head of the family, and it is not until we have read all four of the stories that we can obtain a complete view of his character. He is a living, breathing man, and we see the expression on his face, and hear the tones of his voice, which his daughters imitate so irresistibly. With all his pride and prejudice, with all his childish irritableness, he is the idol of the household. His skull is as thick as English oak, but he has a heart of gold. He is stupid, but never contemptible. And when the war with Germany breaks out in 1914, he rises to a magnificent climax in the altercation with Armitage Brown. We hear in his torrent of angry eloquence not merely the voice of one man, but the combined voices of all the generations that have developed him.

Yet while Mr. Marshall has made an outstanding and unforgettable figure of the fox-hunting Squire, it is in the portrayal of the

women of the family that he shows his most delicate art. This is possibly because his skill as an artist is reinforced by profound sympathy. The Squire is so obtuse that it has never dawned upon his mind that his wife is a thousand times cleverer than he, or that her daily repression has in it anything savouring of tragedy. In the third book, *The Honour of the Clintons*, intense and prolonged suffering begins to sharpen his dull sight; and the scenes between the old pair are unspeakably tender and beautiful. Mr. Marshall never preaches, never tries to adorn the tale by pointing a moral. But the wild escapade of the daughter in the first of these stories, and the insistence of the mother on a superior education for the twins exhibit more clearly than any letter to the *Times* could do, what the author thinks about the difference between the position women have held in English country homes and the position they ought to have.

Of all his characters, perhaps those that the reader will remember with the highest flood of happy recollection are the twins, Joan and Nancy. In the first novel, this wonderful pair are aged thirteen; in the second, they are fifteen; in the third, they are twenty-one. Mr.

Marshall is particularly skilful in the drawing of young girls; and after one has read *Ann Veronica*, I can think of no better antidote than these Clinton books. Whatever may be woman's place in the future, whatever she may drink or smoke or wear or say or do, there is one kind of girl that can never become unattractive; and the Clinton twins illustrate that kind. They are healthy, modest, quick-witted, affectionate, high-spirited; when they come in laughing and glowing from a game of tennis, and take their places at the family tea-table, they bring the breath of life into the room.

In *The Eldest Son*, which of the four delightful books dealing with the Clinton family, I find most delightful, there is a suggestion of the author's attitude toward humanity in the procession of candidates for governess that passes before the penetrating eyes of Mrs. Clinton. Her love for the old Starling—one of the most original of Mr. Marshall's creations—has not blinded Mrs. Clinton to the latter's incompetence for the task of training so alert a pair as the twins. Of the women who present themselves for this difficult position, not one is wholly desirable; and it is plain that Mrs. Clinton knows in advance that this will be the case.

Shé is not looking for an ideal teacher, for such curiosities are not to be found on our planet; the main requisite is brains, and she selects finally the candidate whom many society women would immediately dismiss as impossible, the uncompromising, hard-headed, sexless Miss Phipps, who has about as much amenity as a steamroller. Miss Phipps bristles with faults; but they are the faults that spring from excess of energy, from a devotion to scholarship so exclusive that the minor graces and minor pleasures of life have received in her daily scheme even less than their due. But the twins already possess everything lacking in the composition of their teacher; what they need is not a sweet, sympathetic companion, what they need is what nearly every one needs, mental discipline, mental training, and an increase in knowledge and ideas. In this dress-parade of candidates we have a miniature parade of humanity in the large; no one is faultless; but those who have an honest mind and an honest character have something essential. And who knows but what the shrewd and deep-hearted Mrs. Clinton did not also see that in the association of this mirthless expert with two young incarnations of vitality and vivacity, both par-

ties to the contract might learn something of value? Miss Phipps is about to discover that the country-side in winter has resources entirely unguessed at by her bookish soul; that there are many of her countrymen and countrywomen who find in outdoor sport a secret of health and happiness.

Her bedroom was in the front of the house, and she had heard, without much heeding them, the wheels and the beat of horse-hoofs and the voices outside. Now she began to be a little curious as to what was going on, and rose and drew up her blind and looked out.

The scene was quite new to her, and in spite of herself she exclaimed at it. Immediately beyond the wide gravel sweep in front of the house was the grass of the park, where the whole brave show of the South Meadshire Hunt was collected. It is doubtful if she had ever seen a pack of hounds in her life, and she watched them as if fascinated. Presently, at some signal which she had not discerned, the huntsman and the whips turned and trotted off with them, and behind them streamed all the horsemen and horsewomen, the carriages and carts, and the people on foot, until the whole scene which had been so full of life and colour was entirely empty of all human occupation, and there was only the damp grass of the park and the big bare trees under the pearly grey of the winter sky. She saw the Squire ride off on his powerful horse, and admired his sturdy erect carriage, and she saw Dick and Virginia, side by side, Humphrey, the pink of sartorial hunting perfection, Mrs. Clinton in her carriage, with Miss Dexter by her side and the

twins opposite to her, and for a moment wished she had accepted her invitation to make one of the party, although she did not in the least understand where they were going to, or what they were going to do when they got there. All this concourse of apparently well-to-do and completely leisured people going seriously about a business so remote from any of the interests in life that she had known struck her as entirely strange and inexplicable. She might have been in the midst of some odd rites in an unexplored land. The very look of the country in its winter dress was strange to her, for she was a lifelong Londoner and the country to her only meant a place where one spent summer holidays.

VII

THE novel *Watermeads* (1916), particularly welcome to me because the friend who wore a grotesque mask in *Upsidonia* showed his healthy, agreeable, English face again, opens characteristically with the entire family gathered around the tea-table in a sunlit room in an old manor house. This story is mainly concerned with the waxing and waning of a marriage-engagement; the rich fiancée seems well enough among her own people and in her own environment; her lack of breeding appears with steadily increasing emphasis when she is brought into the circle of the squire's household. The restraint shown by Mr. Marshall in contrasting her with the people among whom she is expected to live is worthy of the highest praise. There is nothing exaggerated, not a trace of burlesque; little touches, shades of speech and conduct, the expression at the corners of the girl's mouth when she is displeased or unsatisfied, all combine to lower the temperature in her lover's heart. Nor is there anything snobbish in this increasing coldness.

No matter how important may be a difference in manners or social breeding, love could make a happy fusion; it is, however, not in one act of villainy, but in many trifles light as air that the young woman is finally, even to the myopic eyes of passion, revealed as wholly selfish.

Two accidents—youth and cash—give to this girl an assurance that finally makes her odious; but women who have neither can be equally offensive. Her prospective mother-in-law, the squire's wife, parades the decline in the family's finances so obtrusively that she becomes as tiresome as a flapping curtain. When Lord Kirby is shown by her through the ancestral home, he escapes with a sense of enormous relief, saying to his wife, "That's an awful woman. You hear about people being purse-proud, but she seems to be empty-purse-proud, and I don't know that that isn't worse. If people are as hard up as that they ought to hide it."

In *Abington Abbey* (1917) and *The Graftons* (1918) we have really one book, and the last page of the sequel makes me hope that the history of this charming family may be continued—I don't care through how many volumes. Mr. Grafton is a gentleman, and the way in

which he settles the various problems of family discipline and the affairs of the estate springs from his unerring good sense. His daughters adore their widower-father, but each in her own manner. And though they are all attractive, I know which one I like the best.

Mr. Marshall published with *The Graftons* an exceedingly interesting Introduction, containing a defense of his methods which is not needed by intelligent readers, but which may enlighten those who do not understand what he is about. In a personal letter, however, he expressed himself in words that I like better than his printed apologia. "The Grafton family isn't so rich in varied interest as the Clinton family, but I hope they will make their friends. I think they are as 'nice' a family as any I've drawn. I set out simply to show them in their country home, and make their country neighbours display themselves in the light of their critical humour, without much idea of a story. It turned into something rather different, and I'm not quite sure about it yet. And it has taken two books to work it out."

Now the reason why I like this ink-epistle better than the formal preface is because in the latter Mr. Marshall seemed to think it nec-

essary to reply to those critics who said he ought to discuss in his novels the economic questions concerned with the tenure of the land. If he should by some evil temptation make economic questions the basis of his stories of English country life, he would commit the cardinal sin that has corrupted so much of contemporary fiction, the sin that I condemned at the outset of this essay. The most conspicuous element in his art is Charm. If some one should persuade him that he ought to become more "serious," his novels would lose their atmosphere; and he might find himself writing like that earnest student of modern movements, Mrs. Humphry Ward.

I am aware that the most insulting epithet that can be applied to a book, or a play, or a human being is the word "Puritan"; and I remember reading a review somewhere of *Abington Abbey* which commented rather satirically on the interview between Grafton and Lassigny, and most satirically of all on the conclusion of the interview, which left the stiff, prejudiced, puritanical British parent in possession of the field. But once more, Mr. Marshall is not trying to prove a thesis; he is representing the Englishman and the French-

man in a hot debate, where neither is right and neither is wrong, but where each is partly right and partly wrong. Each says in the heat of the contest something injudicious, even as men do when they are angry. But when Lasigny literally takes French leave, we do not care who has scored the most points; the real winner is the one who is not present—the girl herself. For when two men fight about a woman, as they do somewhere every day, the truly important question is not, which man wins the fight? The only real question is, does the woman win?

It will never do to make generalizations from merely one of Mr. Marshall's novels. If we had only *Abington Abbey*, we might imagine that he detested the clergy, for the clergyman in this book is surely detestable; but in *The Greatest of These* there are two clergymen who are admirable characters, and a third who is by no means wholly or even mainly evil. Like an honest student of life, Mr. Marshall never considers a man as a representative of a business, but as a human being. No man is good because he is a clergyman; but it would be well perhaps if every member of that highest of all professions were a clergyman because he was good.

VIII

THERE is an unconscious double meaning in the American name given to the novel published in 1914, *The Greatest of These*, for it can be taken not only in the Pauline significance, but as the greatest of these books we are considering. It is the most ambitious and on the whole the most effective of its author's productions, containing also the essence of his religion—charity contrasted with opinions. We have an illustration of his favourite method of portraying the shade and shine of human character by placing in opposition two leading representatives of two large classes of nominal Christians—a clergyman of the Church of England and a minister of the Dissenters. Mr. Marshall never wrote a better first chapter. The reader is instantly aware that he has in his hands a masterpiece. Every leading character is introduced in the opening chapter either in person or in allusive conversation, and we know that Mr. Marshall has what most novelists seek in vain—a real plot. This book, which eventually rises to the highest spiritual altitude at-

tained thus far by its author, begins on a note of sordid sex-tragedy, as unusual in the stories of Mr. Marshall as a picture like the Price household is in the work of Jane Austen; here it serves to bring forward the forthright and self-satisfied Anglican, who little dreams of his approaching humiliation; he is brought into conflict with a kind of Zeal-of-the-land Busy, whose aggressive self-righteousness is to be softened by the very man who he hoped would harden it. Here too, as in *Exton Manor*, we come as near as we ever come in Mr. Marshall's books to meeting a villain—in each case it is a woman with a serpent's tongue.

The time-element in *The Greatest of These* is managed with consummate skill. So far as the novel has a hero, it is the Rev. Dr. Merrow. He does not appear in Roding until the one-hundred-and-sixty-third page, but there is so much talk, for and against him, that the reader awaits his arrival at the railway station with fully as much eagerness as any of the village gossips. And then, owing to the Doctor's fatigue from the journey, the reader is as baffled as the parishioners. It is quite impossible to discover what manner of man he is. The author refuses to help us, preferring to let

his leading character reveal himself without any manipulation behind the scenes. This revelation is gradual, made up of many little details of speech and behaviour, as it would be in real life.

But although the personality of the man is not clear until more than half of the book has passed, the ninth chapter, which shows him in action in London as a public institution, is one of the most powerful pieces of prose Mr. Marshall has ever composed. He writes as if inspired by the theme. Not only is it a magnificent description of a great occasion, its dramatic power is immensely heightened because we see it through the eyes of a young ritualist, to whom it is as strange—and at first as repellent—as some vulgar heathen observance. But gradually distaste changes to interest, and interest to enthusiasm. Such passages as the following are entirely unlike the ordinary current of Mr. Marshall's style, but it is a proof that he can reach the heights when the occasion calls.

There came more of these sentences. The spark had caught; the furnace was beginning to glow. George gazed at the preacher with his own face alight. His surroundings were forgotten. . . . If this was the

kind of preaching that had brought Dr. Merrow his great reputation, then he understood its appeal, and was himself moved by it. It came from something beyond creeds, far beyond differences in methods of worship. It had been heard in all ages of the Church, amidst the splendours of mediæval superstition, as in the crude barrenness of modern revivalism. The spirit moved on the face of the waters; the stagnancy of mere words was broken; there was life and healing in them.

The words came faster. The voice grew stronger, and took on a different tone, as if on an organ a touch of reed had been added to diapason. The slightly bent figure became straighter, the worn face younger. The preacher began to use his hands—thin, flexible, nervous hands, which seemed to clutch at deep truths, and fling them out for the world to take hold of. Soon the burning words came in a torrent, as of a rushing mass of water of irresistible force, yet bound within its directing channel. Every now and then they sank to a deep calm, but were still infused with the same concentrative power. Such words had stirred men's minds and souls in long past ages. Spoken on bare hillsides underneath the symbol of faith, they had converted kingdoms. Flung forth over throngs of rough fighting men, they had turned bloodshed and rapine into righteous crusades. Their power was older than that of Christianity itself. In the dim ages of religious history it had singled out Aaron for the priesthood, and put him above Moses, the warrior leader. Later, it had burst the bonds of the priesthood itself, and winged the utterances of great prophets.

Every page that we turn in this extraordinary book lessens the distance not only in time

but in sympathy between the Rector and the Pastor. The orthodox evangelical chapel orator is drawn with just the insight one would superficially *not* expect from a man of Mr. Marshall's birth, breeding, and environment. He is certainly the author's finest achievement, even finer than Squire Clinton, for he is more difficult to draw. The Rev. Dr. Merrow must be added to Chaucer's Poore Person and to Goldsmith's Village Preacher as one more permanent clerical figure in imaginative literature.

Lesser personages in this story are given with the same care in detail, until we feel their presence as personal friends. The curate, the Rev. George Barton, so completely misunderstood by Mrs. Merrow, is an almost flawless portrait. His healthy, athletic outdoor nature and the development of his inner life are both presented with subtle, delicate strokes of the pen possible only to an artist of distinction.

It is interesting to contemplate side by side in the reader's mind the wife of the Rector and the wife of the Pastor. Both are good women—their only similarity. Lady Ruth, a born aristocrat, with a "temperamental inability to comport herself as the busy wife of a busy

clergyman'' is one of the most gracious and lovely figures created by our novelist, which means that her charm is irresistible. The less admirable, but more energetic wife of Dr. Merrow is so perfect a representative of the busy city pastor's helpmate that we can only wonder how it is possible to put on paper any creation so real. There is not a false touch in this picture. William Allingham wrote in his diary after reading one of Browning's poems, "Bravo, Browning!" Upon finishing *The Greatest of These*, which I confidently call a great novel, I could hardly refrain from a shout of applause.

IX

MR. MARSHALL is a twentieth century novelist, because he is happily yet alive, and because he writes of twentieth century scenes and characters; but he is apart from the main currents of twentieth century fiction, standing indeed in the midst of the stream like a commemorative pillar to Victorian art. He has never written historical romance, which dominated the novel at the beginning of our century; he has never written the "life" novel—beginning with the hero's birth and travelling with plotless chronology, the type most in favour since the year 1906; he has never written a treatise and called it a novel, as so many of his contemporaries have done. Every one of his novels, except the two unfortunate burlesques, is a good story, with a good plot and living characters; and he has chosen to write about well-bred people, because those are the people he knows best.

It is also well to remember, that although his best novels are parochial, he himself is a

citizen of the world. He has seen the North Cape, he has lived in the Australian bush, in various European cities, and has traveled extensively in America. One reason why he can describe English country life so clearly is because he sees it in the proper perspective. He is at home in any community on earth.

I call him a realistic novelist, because his realism is of the highest and most convincing kind—it constantly reminds us of reality. I cannot see why a well-constructed story, that deals mainly with attractive men and women, and ends on a note of robust cheerfulness, should have any less right to the adjective “realistic” than an ill-arranged transcript of the existence of creatures living amongst poverty, filth, and crime. And so far as Mr. Marshall’s Victorian reticence on questions of sex is concerned, this strengthens his right to the title Realist. As Henry James said, the moment you insist that animalism must have its place in works of art, there almost always seems to be no place for anything else. If a novelist is to represent real life, he must make subordinate and incidental what in some novels dominates every page. If a writer is to describe events as they really happen, to

portray men and women as they really are, to create living characters that can be recognized in modern society, he ought to emphasize in his art what life itself emphasizes—the difference between man and the lower animals. The curious thing is that in many so-called realistic novels it is impossible to distinguish between human beings and the beasts of the field; the well-understood likeness is stressed so heavily that not only the individual, but even the type is lost. One can hardly call so total an absence of discrimination true art. Even the most elementary man or woman is less elementary than a beast; and is it not true that the greater the complexity, the greater the skill required to report it truly?

And here is a strange thing. It is only in stories of human beings that our would-be realists insist that animalism should be most frankly and most minutely portrayed. When we come to dog-stories—of which there are many—the element of sex is as a rule wholly omitted. Yet surely this is more salient in the life of a dog than in the life of a man.

Archibald Marshall is a realist. He represents cultivated men and women as we saw them yesterday, and as we shall see them to-

morrow. He seldom disappoints us, for among all living novelists, whilst he is not the greatest, he is the most reliable. It is difficult to analyse the extraordinary charm of his stories, for they are simpler than simplicity. He takes us literally into the bosom of a family, where each member has a distinct individuality, and the novel progresses like beautiful voices with orchestral accompaniment—each individual in turn singing an air, while the family fortunes supply the harmony. To read his books is to associate with people whom it is highly important to know—not because of their social standing, but because of their solid worth. His good characters are fundamentally good. They are seldom brilliant, and almost never reformers. They are more altruistic than philanthropic. They possess the fine old virtues of purity, wholesomeness, generosity, loving-kindness, honesty, loyalty, tact, consideration; such persons are always lovable in life, which is why they are lovable in these books. His heroes are not saviours of society, they are simply good companions, be the weather fair or foul; and we are never sickened by the diaphanous veneer of sentimentality. His villains seldom break the law of the land, and do not

reek of melodrama. They are inconsiderate, garrulous, inopportune, stupid, meddling, officiously helpful, which is sometimes worse than deliberate hostility. Mrs. Prentice in *Exton Manor* is his most offensive specimen, and according to the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, she is one of the four things for which the earth is disquieted—"an odious woman when she is married." These respectable villains, who often cause more suffering than professional criminals, receive the punishment of unpopularity. But in most of his characters the elements are more kindly mixed. We have on every page the delight of recognition—the figures are so perfectly drawn that we are under the illusion that they are alive.

Although these stories are never explicitly didactic, they are ethically as well as artistically true. Beneath the surface of light conversation and trivial incident we find an idea that works for righteousness. This idea is so variously and so frequently illustrated that I think it must be the foundation of the author's philosophy of life and conduct. He would have us believe that different individuals, different social classes, different communities dislike and distrust each other mainly through ignorance.

He would not say in the old phrase, to understand is to forgive, he would say something without any taint of condescension, something finer and more fruitful—to understand is to respect, to admire, to love. The inefficient aristocrat and the pushing millionaire despise each other, the haughty Churchman and the pious Dissenter distrust each other's motives until they are brought by the force of circumstances into an unescapable daily intimacy; the result of which to both is surprising and agreeable. Apparently what we all need is more imagination, more intelligence. These novels make a combined attack on the last infirmity of both noble and ignoble minds, that last citadel of stupidity—Prejudice.

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